

## C.I.A.'s Nicaragua Role: A Proposal or a Reality?

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WASHINGTON, March 16 — Nicaragua's assertion today that guerrillas, acting under American direction, blew up two bridges Sunday has again raised questions about what covert role the United States is playing in Central America.

The Sandinist-led Government of Nicaragua announced a state of emergency Monday night and placed its security forces on full alert today. The Nicaraguan authorities said the two moves were necessary to counter American plans to undermine the Government.

News accounts, some of them conflicting, have been published in recent days about covert American actions in Central America.

### Covert Actions Hard to Confirm

The reports have said that the Reagan Administration is providing financial aid to moderate groups in Nicaragua, is building a 500-member paramilitary force to cut the flow of arms to El Salvador, and is establishing a paramilitary force to attack Nicaraguan dams, power stations and bridges.

Covert actions, by their nature, are difficult to confirm and characterize. They are planned so that even senior Government officials can truthfully deny knowing the details. As a result, it is often impossible to determine which plans are implemented.

Most of the material that has been made available to reporters comes from option papers prepared for discussion at a National Security Council meeting last November.

According to officials familiar with the deliberations, President Reagan and his senior national security advisers were given a series of options ranging from taking direct military action against Cuba to improving United States intelligence-gathering operations in Central America.

One proposal suggested using American funds and military personnel to organize and direct a 500-member unit made up mostly of Cuban exiles. It projected the cost for this group at \$19.95 million, according to officials and documents that have been made available.

A second proposal called for American assistance in the formation of a 1,000-member paramilitary force al-

ready being assembled by Latin American nations, including Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia. The United States would provide money and advisers for this unit, but would not supervise it, according to the plan.

A third proposal called for expanding the Carter Administration's efforts to provide covert financial aid to what the United States viewed as moderate economic and political forces in Nicaragua, including small businesses and political parties.

According to officials familiar with the White House meeting, a final decision was deferred on the paramilitary force, and the Central Intelligence Agency was ordered to review the proposal. The officials said concern was expressed at the meeting about recruiting former national guardsmen identified with Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the Nicaraguan strongman who was overthrown in 1979.

A week later, at a second National Security Council meeting, President Reagan approved an expansion of the covert financial aid program for democratic forces in Nicaragua, according to the sources.

It is not known how much money the United States is funneling to Nicaragua, nor how it is distributed. Nor is it clear who the recipients are.

The senior officials said several million dollars was a realistic estimate of the initial allocation.

### Other Covert Actions

Although it is known that Mr. Reagan approved other covert actions, including the formation of some kind of paramilitary force, few details have been made available. It is not clear, for example, whether he approved the plan involving the 500-member, American-supervised force, or the one involving the 1,000-member force being assembled by Argentina, or a combination of the two proposals.

Officials said final plans called for using the force against Cuban supply lines in Central America, such as arms delivery routes to Nicaragua and El Salvador.

They said Mr. Reagan also approved an expansion of American intelligence-gathering operations.